

For Immediate Release
March 9, 2005

Contact: Nicole Vickey, Alabama Coastal Program Director
(251) 473-4009

NOAA Provides Grant Money for Reef Restoration

Congressional delegates help secure funding for Alabama and Mississippi project.

BIRMINGHAM, AL — Reef habitat in eastern Mississippi Sound will be protected and restored with a \$35,500 grant given to The Nature Conservancy in Alabama and Mississippi by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

The project will focus on restoration of five acres of reef habitat in partnership with the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources. The Conservancy will also identify an additional 30 acres of ecologically suitable reef restoration sites across Mississippi Sound, in both Alabama and Mississippi waters, for which to seek future restoration funding.

"The NOAA Community-based Restoration Program (CRP) has been a wonderful vehicle for bringing conservation partners in both Mississippi and Alabama together toward restoring our reefs and estuaries," said Robbie Fisher, Mississippi's state director. "Full funding for this program is critical to support many ecologically significant restoration projects around the Gulf."

Reefs stabilize estuaries, decrease shoreline erosion and provide critical fisheries habitat. Reefs that support mature populations of filter feeders, such as oysters, also benefit water quality by filtering out nutrients. The creation of reefs using oyster shell and other materials provides important habitat for the natural setting of oyster larvae.

Jeff Danter, Alabama's state director, said the Conservancy is proud to be chosen for the funding. "To date, nearly \$15 million of project requests await funding through NOAA's Community-based Restoration Program. With full support, this program will continue to encourage community stewardship of Alabama and Mississippi's precious resources."

Both Fisher and Danter thanked Congressmen Jo Bonner from the 1st District of Alabama and Congressman Gene Taylor from the 4th District of Mississippi for securing the current grant funds. Both Congressmen were supportive of the project.

Congressman Taylor pointed to the need to strengthen the area's natural marine resources, saying, "As south Mississippi continues to grow we must ensure that our children and grandchildren can reap the benefits of a sound coastal ecology, just as our ancestors did. Working with NOAA and the Nature Conservancy, we hope to preserve and enhance that which makes our home so unique."

Congressman Bonner was quoted as saying, "I was very pleased to learn that The Nature Conservancy has been approved for this funding. The Conservancy and numerous other organizations in the Alabama and Mississippi coastal region have devoted many years of work to preserving the marine habitats found in the Gulf of Mexico. The funding from this grant will enable The Conservancy to continue their efforts in reef preservation and thus ensure the ongoing viability of the Gulf as a place of beauty, a place of commerce, and a protective barrier for the coastal zones in our two states. I was honored to play a part in this process and look forward to witnessing the continued benefits from the reef restoration project in the time ahead."

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The Nature Conservancy is a leading international, nonprofit organization that preserves plants, animals and natural communities representing the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. Visit us on the Web at nature.org/alabama.